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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [AMGT](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: UPDATED DEMOCRATIC REFORM STRATEGY FOR QATAR

REF: A. SECSTATE 130991
[1](#)B. 05 STATE 152818
[1](#)C. 05 DOHA 881

[1](#)1. (U) Embassy Doha continues to use a combination of programmatic and diplomatic means to assist the GOQ in its efforts to build and sustain democratic institutions. In line with the Mission Strategic Plan, Post has expanded its areas of emphasis to include: promoting democratic elections, promoting rule of law and legislative reform, supporting civil society development, supporting freedom of expression and independent media, and engaging youth.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Qatar has proceeded at a steady but markedly measured pace toward building democratic institutions since the current Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, took power in 1995. At that time, the establishment of democratic governance was among his top national objectives. Since then, Qatar has held three municipal elections with full women's participation and has promulgated a new constitution that establishes a two-thirds elected legislative body. These steps, in the Qatari view, place Qatar in the vanguard of Arab political reform. It is important for the USG to bolster this reform effort as much as possible while respecting Qatar's own vision and being careful not to dominate the reform discourse. Thus, our strategy is based on mirroring Qatari goals wherever possible, filling in with USG technical and programmatic assistance to strengthen the reform foundation. Democratic reform remains a "top-down" priority in Qatar; therefore, major efforts will continue to increase awareness of the benefits of reform and broader political participation from the "bottom-up."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Since the establishment of the Democratic Reform Strategy for Qatar in 2005 (refs B and C), there has been a marked increase in the willingness of GOQ stakeholders to cooperate with USG democracy efforts in the region, and in Qatar itself, with one big caveat: there should not be even the perception that democratic reform, especially USG-initiated reform, is being imposed. With this in mind, careful efforts have been made to ensure that programmatic and diplomatic efforts reflect the needs and the will of the Qatari people and the GOQ. The following resources permitting, comprise Post's Democratic Reform Strategy for 2008:

Promoting Democratic Elections

[1](#)4. (U) Qatar held its third elections for the Central Municipal Council in April 2007. USG programmatic efforts centered on providing technical assistance to the Qatar

Permanent Election Committee (PEC) with emphasis on increasing voter awareness and candidate training. Qatar is expected to hold the first elections for its parliamentary body, the Advisory Council, as soon as November 2008. The PEC has planned training and awareness programs in anticipation of the elections and has requested USG assistance.

¶5. (U) Programmatic strategy will include:

- Technical assistance to the PEC in advance of the anticipated legislative elections.
- Increasing capacity of civil society actors to spread awareness of the legislative elections and benefits of full participation.
- Technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior in its effort to run the technical aspects of the election.
- Legal assistance in evaluating the upcoming election law.

¶6. (U) Diplomatic strategy will include:

- Engaging election officials at the PEC and the MOI to judge the capacity to prepare for and run fair, competitive elections.
- Engaging GOQ stakeholders to expand capacity to stand for office to all citizens.

Promoting Rule of Law and Legislative Reform

¶7. (SBU) The Qatar legal system has generally improved in line with its goal to become independent and consistent with international standards, while at the same time retaining

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fair and equitable Shari'a standards with regard to family and civil law. Still, more improvements can and must be made. The current legislative process is not transparent and most deliberations take place behind the closed doors of the Amiri Diwan and the Council of Ministers. The expected establishment of a parliamentary body that will have legislative powers makes the establishment of parliamentary and legislative procedures imperative to the success of the Advisory Council and a democratically-elected body. The elected Central Municipal Council currently has no legislative or legal power over municipal affairs and is unaware of its potential ability to influence the establishment of or amendments to legislation. The current sponsorship and immigration laws in many instances promote modern-day slavery conditions among the large migrant worker population of Qatar, often resulting in government-condoned, non-prosecuted trafficking-in-persons (TIP) cases.

¶8. (U) Programmatic strategy will include:

- Technical assistance to the Qatar University College of Law on curriculum reform.
- Visitor program opportunities for members of the legal system in Qatar to experience legal systems outside of Qatar.
- Technical assistance to the currently appointed Advisory Council and administrative staff on parliamentary and legislative procedures.
- Technical assistance to the Central Municipal Council and administrative staff on parliamentary procedures and means of advocacy.
- Technical assistance through the Supreme Judicial Council and the Ministry of Labor on internationally accepted labor practices and law.
- Technical assistance through the MOI regarding the identification of TIP violations and protection of victims.
- Legal assistance to Labor Ministry in effort to reform labor laws.
- Commercial law development assistance.

¶9. (U) Diplomatic strategy will include:

- Advocating legal reform in accordance with internationally accepted norms.
- Advocating transparency in the legislative process.
- Engaging Advisory Council members and staff on duties and responsibilities of the body.
- Engaging CMC members and staff on ability to influence municipal legislation.
- Engaging GOQ and civil society stakeholders on the extent and effects of forced labor and TIP.
- Encouraging best practices with regard to combating TIP.

Supporting Civil Society Development

¶10. (U) GOs, as the term is internationally recognized, do not exist in Qatar. The current law on associations and professional organizations effectively discourages their establishment. Instead, the GOQ has created a network of government-supported civil society organizations (CSOs), most under the umbrella of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs (SCFA). The GOQ has also established the Qatar National Human Rights Committee (NHRC). While effective in many basic ways, their attachment to the GOQ and to government funding lessens their ability to effect real reform. Civil society development is crucial to building an effective democratic society.

¶11. (U) Programmatic strategy will include:

- Identifying and building capacity of nascent NGOs/associations within existing legal framework.
- Providing technical assistance to the SCFA in their effort to establish an NGO training center.
- Providing technical assistance to expatriate community groups in assisting the legal rights of migrant workers.
- Providing regional and international training opportunities to civil activists and NGO/CSO management.

¶12. (U) Diplomatic strategy will include:

- Engaging civil society activists in effort to form NGOs interested in promoting democracy and human rights.
- Engaging GOQ stakeholders in effort to reform restrictive laws prohibiting freedom of association and legal formation of effective NGOs.

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- Cooperating with the NHRC to promote internationally accepted human rights practices.

Supporting Freedom of Expression and Independent Media

¶13. (SBU) Freedom of expression, although "guaranteed" in the constitution, is severely restricted in practice. Citizens will normally not speak out against government policy or the ruling family in fear of losing favor and/or privileges. The media is heavily dependent on expatriate journalists who will normally not attempt to criticize government policy or actions in fear of losing their jobs and summary deportation.

Although newspapers are privately owned, owners and management are closely tied to the ruling family. Qatar Radio and Television are state-owned. Al-Jazeera Arabic is funded primarily by the government and Al-Jazeera International (English) focuses its reports on the lesser-covered "South," i.e. the developing world.

¶14. (SBU) Article 49 of the Qatari Constitution states: "Freedom of the press, printing, and publication shall be guaranteed in accordance with law," referring to Qatar's Press and Publications Law of 1979. This law contains highly restrictive provisions fundamentally in conflict with the concept of "freedom of the press" as understood today. In

addition to promoting professionalism in the local media through training and exchange programs, the USG should use its influence to encourage an amended press law, the establishment of a Qatari journalists' association, and measures that encourage young Qataris to embrace journalism as a profession. The Qatar Foundation is currently in negotiations to open a branch of an American school of journalism and mass communications, and Qatar University's College of Mass Communications actively seeks to raise standards of the program by increasing the College's public and private partnerships.

¶15. (U) Programmatic strategy will include:

- Speakers in the areas of free expression of ideas and free press.
- Professional journalism training to Qatari and expatriate journalists and managers.
- Ethics training to journalists and managers.
- Specialty training to journalists in the areas of elections, policy, and human rights.
- Support to Qatari efforts to open an American school of journalism in Doha.

¶16. (U) Diplomatic strategy will include:

- Engaging GOQ and media stakeholders in promotion of an independent, free media.
- Holding roundtables/"salons" promoting the free expression of ideas.
- Engaging Al-Jazeera (Arabic and English) news staff regarding the airing of balanced international and regional coverage, including Qatar.
- Encouraging the development of a stronger College of Mass Communications and the journalism program at Qatar University (this could become a programmatic effort).

Engaging Youth

¶17. (SBU) Half of the Qatari citizen population is under 20 years of age. The public system will be unable to absorb the large numbers of youth entering the labor market. Many young male Qataris are opting out of advanced education expecting to be taken care of in the public sector. The lack of "qualified" jobs for young Qataris may cause dissatisfaction with regard to status quo policies. While educational opportunities within Qatar have increased with the establishment of Education City, many Qataris will continue to go abroad for education, exposing them to non-Qatari, non-Arab, and non-Muslim societies.

¶18. (SBU) The most serious challenge facing Qatari youth is "the disease of luxury." With so much wealth at their disposal, young Qataris, especially young men, have little incentive to seek advanced education or to work hard. Motivating this generation is Qatari society's biggest challenge. In 2001, under the banner of "Education for a New Era," Qatar embarked upon a process to reform the educational

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system from kindergarten through college. Among other progressive requirements, all independent schools are mandated to teach science and mathematics in English, and to include a civic education component in the academic curriculum.

¶19. (U) Programmatic strategy will include:

- Technical assistance to increase the offering of civic education in the schools.
- Cultural exchange opportunities for Qatari youth.
- Technical assistance to the Office of Professional Development at the Supreme Education Council (SEC) and the College of Education at Qatar University.

- Support to newly established student/youth clubs and student councils in local schools and universities.

¶20. (U) Diplomatic strategy will include:

- Engaging the Ministry of Education and SEC on curriculum reform.
- Engaging Qatari youth, encouraging creative thinking and expression of ideas.
- Increasing the number of school visits and educational outreach programs targeting youth.

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